

## Christian Zionism as Religious Nationalism Par Excellence

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Tristan Sturm

### **Christian Zionism as Religious Nationalism *Par Excellence***

In August 2015, former Governor of Arkansas and 2016 Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee declared to reporters at a fundraiser in the Israeli settlement of Shilo, "If you're going to visit Israel you should visit all of Israel, and that would include Judea and Samaria."<sup>1</sup> A Southern Baptist minister who has visited Israel and Palestine "dozens of times" since 1973, Huckabee was declaring his prophetic End Time evangelical theology, which states that modern Israel and Jews are ancient Israel and Hebrews, respectively. More importantly, he was declaring the West Bank an Israeli national sovereign territory in pursuit of the biblical territorial maximalism written in Deuteronomy (11:24) where Israel would extend from the Euphrates to the Nile. Such biblical declarations for *irredenta* Israeli rights to settle Palestinian territory are at odds with decades of U.S. foreign policy that has long sought a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Huckabee continued, "I wasn't in the least hesitant to go to Shilo, in part because 3,500 years ago it was the capital of Israel, it was the seat of the Tabernacle, it is a place of great connection to the history of the Jewish people... The notion of two governments working the same piece of land is unrealistic and unworkable."<sup>2</sup>

Huckabee is not the only U.S. politician to hold such views. His fellow former GOP presidential candidate, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, also took a trip to Israel in 2015, where he spoke to the Israeli *Knesset* (Parliament). At a conference of Middle East Christians in 2014, Cruz stated "Christians have no greater ally than Israel." Cruz was booed off the stage because many Arab Christians feel Israel is oppressive and threatening to their well-being. After the incident, Rob McCoy, a pastor at Godspeak Calvary, said "Cruz's statement that 'Christians have no greater ally than Israel' is dispensationalist."<sup>3</sup> Cruz's statement of course raises the question: how does Cruz think that Israel, a *de jure* Jewish state, is a greater ally than the United States, a *de facto* Christian state? And why are U.S. evangelicals raising money, expressing national allegiance, and declaring sovereign rights for a foreign state? McCoy's observation is key: both Cruz and Huckabee are Christian Zionists who follow a particular apocalyptic theology called premillennial dispensationalism, which I explore further below.

U.S. Christian Zionists have increasingly become powerful actors in the Israel and Palestine conflict. This, I argue, is motivated by their aspirations for Christ's return upon the Apocalypse, and increasingly by a national relationship with Jews who they envision being on their side in the cosmological fight between good and evil taking place on Earth. This nationalism—the practices of an imagined nation—is better termed as "Judeo-Evangelical nationalism." Judeo-Evangelical nationalism sharpens the focus on movements often broadly described as the "Judeo-Christian tradition" or as the too-inclusive "Christian Zionism" that would include 19th century groups like the Christian Identity movement and those British and American Mainline Protestants who nevertheless saw Palestine as the Holy Land.<sup>45</sup>

In this article, I describe how a Judeo-Evangelical national identity has emerged among premillennial U.S. Christian Zionists, and specifically how the Christian Zionist apocalyptic narrative expresses itself as a form of religious nationalism. I argue that Christian Zionists practice a form of religious nationalism *par excellence* because it satisfies any detractors of the term in three main ways: (1) their nationalism is embedded in their theology as a religious rite, (2) they are not an ethnic group (an identifier that could stand in for religion), and (3) they largely no longer see Israel as a functional means to their apocalyptic ends.

### **Premillennial Dispensationalism and Functional Anti-Semitism**

Christian Zionists, like Huckabee and Cruz, follow a particular eschatology—the theology of judgment—called premillennial dispensationalism. Premillennial dispensationalists believe Christ will return prior to Christ’s “millennial” rule. They are dispensationalists because they believe that history has been split up into seven historical periods, or dispensations, during each of which God deals with humanity differently. The current, and penultimate dispensation, known as the Church Age, will be followed by the Rapture—that moment when all true believing Christians (evangelicals, in their canon) are sucked into the sky to watch Armageddon from their auditorium seats in Heaven. With the establishment of Israel in 1948, dispensationalists believe that the prophetic wheels have been greased and God’s prophetic hand has once again entered world history. Such prophecy transposes Old Testament geography onto modern states and divides it geopolitically into regions of biblical friends and enemies.<sup>6</sup>

This idea ultimately comes down to honoring what they interpret to be God’s covenants. Eighty-two percent of white U.S. evangelicals and only 40 percent of Jews believe Israel was granted to Jews by the prophetic hand of God.<sup>7</sup> “Israel exists because of a covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob 3,500 years ago—and that covenant still stands,” John Hagee told a group, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at a convention hall in Jerusalem in 2010.<sup>8</sup> Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel (CUFI), has raised \$58 million for Israel and its settlements as of 2009. Hagee and Christian Zionists generally believe that in order for Christ to return, Israel needs to attain its biblical territorial extent conterminously with the expulsion of all Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank. Only then will a final battle of Armageddon take place between the Antichrist and his armies (an amalgam of largely Arabs and Russians) and Christ and his armies (Jews and Westerners who are not Raptured). A 2015 Brookings poll found that 74 percent of evangelicals agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement “World events will turn against Israel the closer we get to the rapture or Endtimes.”<sup>9</sup> Dispensationalist theology poses a fatalistic view of history and posits the inevitability of God’s dealings with humankind. But it is not all left up to God, and U.S. Christian Zionists feel they have a commitment to Israel and Jews that transcends their national allegiance in the name of their redeemer Jesus Christ. They do not take up arms; they are reserved to the position of spectator and work through proxies, from economic and political support for certain religious Zionist and settler Jewish groups in Israel, to more military and colonialism-advancing efforts like raising money for Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) battalions and settlements. Such proxy efforts ostensibly dissolve the contradiction of willing the Apocalypse as they claim God works through them.

Christian Zionism has been charged with anti-Semitism because the Apocalypse leads to a second Holocaust in which Jews only serve a functional role in the Zionism that evangelicals have cultivated. However, and as alluded to in the introduction, they largely no longer see Israel as a functional means to their apocalyptic ends. This latter point contradicts much of the literature that would argue Christian Zionists are not true nationalists because their loyalty to and love for Israelis is a means to an end. This story of Jews serving a functional role for End Times beliefs has been rehashed in many books, but I argue that while the Apocalypse is still a central concern for Christian Zionists, the apocalyptic role of Jews has changed in the last 20 years.<sup>10</sup> Such theology has been met with suspicion since early Zionism and has not quieted since.<sup>11</sup> As American evangelicals embedded themselves within Zionist projects, imbricated within Jewish institutions, and networked with secular and religious Jews, the thought that Jews would suffer the ultimate and final Holocaust at the hands of the armies of the Antichrist became antithetical to their relations with Israeli Jews and to achieving their future histories. Christian Zionist eschatology has revised its theology from a functional role for Jews to a discursive set of relations with Jews. The evidence for this shift can be summed in three ways.

First, because Jesus was Jewish, Christian Zionists increasingly see Judaism as the original and therefore true Christianity. They revise rituals and rites to reflect Jewish traditions with the important caveat that Christ is the Messiah. For example, Saturdays have often become the Sabbath, and Jesus is usually referred to as in his Hebrew name, *Yeshua*. Judaism (including Torah readings)

has been internalized into the rites, rituals, and performances of the affirmation of their religious beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

Second, from nearly a decade of participant observation with Christian Zionists in Israel and Palestine, I witnessed obeisance to those evangelicals who could find Jewish ancestry and make *Aliyah* (immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel). Christian Zionists speak of Judaism and Israelis as an unattainable higher tier in their religious hierarchy. Jews are seen as the Chosen People of Earth—evangelical Christians, on the other hand, are understood as the Chosen People of Heaven. Jewish Israelis, therefore, are to be unwaveringly supported as God’s army soldiering toward the Apocalypse and ultimately Christ’s return.

Third, and crucially, there is a strong move from pre-Tribulation Rapture to post-Tribulation Rapture (that is, the Rapture happens *after* the seven-year Tribulation period that culminates in Armageddon).<sup>13</sup> This eschatological revision means Christians too must suffer with Jews as the Antichrist mounts his war against humanity. In other words, Christian and Jewish apocalyptic histories are fused onto the same horrific timeline. The instrumental logic here is they realized it was not only anti-Semitic and escapist to leave Jews behind to perish, but also following the first and second points, because they increasingly see themselves as proto-Israelis and proto-Jews who are to suffer *with* them. For this reason, Christian Zionists often present two discourses: one for their evangelical congregations and another for the Israeli and U.S. publics. In the former, they more easily preach about Israel’s role in the Apocalypse, though they are usually careful to avoid claims of anti-Semitism by preaching a post-tribulation theology. In the latter public discourse, they express unconditional support for Israel for reasons of a Covenant made by God to secure Israel for Jews.

### **Christian Zionism as Religious Nationalism**

Most nationalists express a devotion to their nation that rings of religion. Indeed, nationalism often finds purpose in religious difference, whether in the Northern Irish context, Poland, Chechnya, Punjab, or Israel and Palestine. Nationalism also often finds historical continuity in religious myths of election, sacred origins, and/or destiny.<sup>14</sup> In other words, ethnic groups of common religious adherence often believe they were chosen by God to fulfill destined Covenants, or that God had their hand in the special creation of that group for a specific purpose. Such devotion is often territorially conceptualized through a geopolitical imagination that divides “internal” and “external,” and the limits of “our nation” and “their nation,” and “our religion” and “their religion.” Most academic work on nationalism has tended to explain away religion as an impotent realm of the private sphere, as an ambiguous trait, or as a function of nationalism—that is, being coopted into the service of nationalism. From this perspective, nationalism was a post-Enlightenment movement, emphasizing socioeconomic factors or cultural or political modernity, where religion is usurped by secular nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

The small body of theoretical literature surrounding religious nationalism has largely been one argued over degrees between secular and religious nationalism. Mark Juergensmeyer, author of the book *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, marks a distinction between secular state nationalisms and religious state ones, and for this reason those scholars of the post-secular literature have argued that nationalism has always had a religious dimension in its language, rituals, and symbols that renders such a distinction between the religious and secular essentialist.<sup>16</sup> In other words, for the post-secular perspective, it is neither religious nor secular; rather, the categories are more complex and intersectional. More convincingly, Rogers Brubaker argues that Juergensmeyer has confused categories of analysis by defining “nationalism in statist terms,” where the state—rather than the nation—is the central source of national identity.<sup>17</sup> While territorial identity of a state is usually fused with the cultural identity of the nation, the subject position is thought of as state-driven. In short, this is religious statism because it ignores other non-state-centric forms of nationalism. This said, it is my position that there can be a distinctive type of nationalism called religious nationalism, one that does not take the lead from a state but rather from a religious group that reveres a group of people, whether themselves or another group and in a state

or not. While this might seem controversial, two points need clarification. First, the diverse work on diaspora nationalism illustrates clearly that a nation does not have to reside in the territory they call their national homeland, and therefore is illustrative of the imagined nature of nationalisms that are separate from state sanctioned rituals and symbols. Second, most literature on nationalism assumes that nationalism is a self-centered imagination and therefore can only be performed within and from that nation.

In the case of U.S. Christian Zionists, they revere, even consecrate, a group of people, Jews, with whom they do not and cannot belong, and a territorial state, Israel, they usually cannot gain citizenship from. This nationalism is religious at its core, sprung from a set of interpretations of the Bible that identifies the Jewish return to Israel as a prophetic sign of the imminence of the Apocalypse. This is religion *as* nationalism. An obvious criticism of such a conclusion would be that this is not nationalism, it is religion. As Brubaker provocatively concluded in this regard, “nationalist politics... remain distinct from... forms of religious politics that seek to transform public life not in the name of the nation, but in the name of God.”<sup>18</sup> A now large literature based in the social sciences has argued, put most forcefully by Tala Asad, anthropologist and author of *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, that religion too is a malleable imagination that should be understood not simply by its beliefs, but also its practices.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, any nationalist rites, rituals, symbols, and performances can also be religious practice. Succinctly put, it is not that “everything is religion, it is just that religion can be virtually anything.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, while not all nationalist expressions are religious, almost any can be adopted into a religious discourse and be performed as such. Religious beliefs and practices do not take form and function in a vacuum; they instead are influenced by culture, political economies, media, and international relations, but are nevertheless still religion.

Therefore, religion is not simply instrumental to nationalist ends, as was expressed by George W. Bush’s appeal to Judeo-Christian values.<sup>21</sup> Nor must nationalism be simply instrumental to religious ends, as when former President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad used “nationalist language he has sometimes used at home [which] may be a cover for sincerely held pan-Islamic ends.”<sup>22</sup> The practice and beliefs of Zionism by U.S. Evangelical Christians are of their religion. This is not to claim that Christian Zionists do not anticipate the state of Israel to be superseded by a Millennial Heaven on Earth, but rather that Judaism, Jews, and Israel are essential parts to their religion, whilst also serving a function in future history.

This Judeo-Christian national identification would seem to defeat any argument that this phenomenon of identifying with another state and ethno-religious community over one’s own is a type of nationalism, but if we define “nation” here as a group of people who feel they have a common past with a territory, sharing common experiences of danger, destiny, historical struggles, and cultural affinity, then there does emerge a type of nationalism cemented in selective interpretations of myths from the Old Testament or “Hebrew Bible.” What diverges in most cases between U.S. Christian Zionists and Israeli Jews is a shared destiny—that of the imminent death by Armageddon—and of course the differing interpretations of who will be the messiah.

### **Judeo-Evangelical Nationalism in American Politics**

The post-9/11 geopolitical vision of U.S. Christian Zionists and their lauded leaders was dominated by Manichean language that demonized and divided the world between absolute Good and Evil. George W. Bush’s language of “axis of evil” resonated with the apocalyptic geopolitics of Christian Zionists: Evil was “over there,” it had an address, and it was knocking on Israel’s door—God’s address. President Trump shares that epic language with Bush but sees the world in more grey tones, between “good” and “bad.” Both promoted a rather uncompromising view about the role of the “promised land,” favoring Israeli over Palestinian actions. Trump cannot be said to be a true-believing evangelical or steadfast torch-bearer for the evangelical Apocalypse, as he has cowed on several fronts.

Although Trump is an unusual fit for the Republican evangelical base, his patriarchal demeanor and promise to usher various wish-list amendments have curried him much favor among the radical Christian Right.<sup>23</sup> He has curried so much favor that in a mid-July 2017 interview, Pat Robertson, a staunch Cold Warrior and perhaps the best known Christian Zionist in America, gave Trump a pass on his Russian dealings. When Robertson asked Trump whether Russia can be trusted as an American ally, Trump replied using his Manichean language, “I think we [Russia and the United States] get along very well, and I think that’s a good thing; that’s not a bad thing.” Robertson, despite having spent five decades hammering home to his viewers of *The 700 Club* that Russia is the apocalyptic Evil Gog and Magog of the Bible, concluded the interview, “I want you [President Trump] to know there are thousands of people praying for you and holding you up all the time.”<sup>24</sup> Robertson’s willingness to overlook his concerns about Russia illustrates the tractable nature of a theology that is presented as immutable divine will, but does not necessarily suggest compliance to the seemingly sacred will of the Republican Party. Most Christian Zionists in the post–Cold War period now believe Russia to be a secondary figure to the Muslim Arab threat.<sup>25</sup> Other evangelicals, like Jerry Falwell, have cited the charge of collusion with Russia as an “attempt to discredit our president,” and another side-stepped Jared Kushner’s alleged involvement in collusion by saying “it’s just like God to use a young Jewish couple to help Christians.”<sup>26</sup> Crucial here is how Christian Zionists interpret both the willingness to assume conspiracy rather than guilt and the emphasis on their divine relationship with Jews.

Christian Zionists recognize Trump not so much as an insider but rather as a vessel for their civil and ethno-religious national goals.<sup>27</sup> Christian Zionists express a kind of duality in their nationalism, diverging in their civic and ethno-religious national devotions. While their civic nationalism still sees the United States as a favored nation of God, their ethno-religious nationalism—one founded in premillennial dispensationalist theology—takes precedent in times of geopolitical crisis.<sup>28</sup> The imminence of the Rapture and the Apocalypse keeps the temporal moment in a steady state of anxious crisis. Presbyterian pastor Marcelo Figueroa and the Jesuit Senior Editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the official magazine of the Jesuits in Rome overseen by the Secretariat of State of the Holy See, recently put this dual national focus thusly: U.S. evangelicals “fight the threats to American Christian values *and* prepare for the imminent justice of an Armageddon, a final showdown between Good and Evil, between God and Satan” [emphasis added].<sup>29</sup> This is important ethically and at a foreign policy scale, where such apocalyptic thought becomes part of a wider set of factors for a specific foreign policy, in this case the uncritical support for Israel, which has led some to rename the GOP, “the Israel Party.”<sup>30</sup> It also isolates or ignores Israel’s neighbors and normalizes a racist geopolitics of exclusion based on similar theological foundations for war shared by ISIS.<sup>31</sup>

In May 2017, President Trump became the first sitting president to visit the Western Wall. Whether this gesture is a tacit recognition of East Jerusalem as sovereign Israeli territory is debatable, given that he refused Netanyahu’s accompaniment. He instead met with the self-styled celebrity Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz for a photograph that would symbolize his visit as one with Judaism and not one with the state of Israel. To meet at the Wall with Netanyahu would be interpreted by his Sunni Arab allies as having sided with the Israelis on the Occupied Territories. Most likely it is for this reason Trump did not announce moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a long prayed-for move by Christian Zionists. Nevertheless, the meeting with the Rabbi was a tip-of-his-hat to his evangelical base, a gesture toward the imagined Judeo-Evangelical nationalism that his base will interpret as Trump being on their side come 2020. A recent poll captures the importance of Israel to evangelicals: “Regarding the importance of a candidate’s position on Israel when voting, 64 percent of Evangelical Republicans say this matters ‘a lot’ compared with just 33 percent of non-Evangelical Republicans and 26 percent of all Americans.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, given that 38 percent of Republican voters are evangelicals, Israel is not so much a Republican issue as an evangelical Republican issue.<sup>33</sup> Christian Zionists are a central election base—both for campaign contributions and votes—for Trump’s future in the White House.

Both Democrats and Republicans want to maintain friendly United States–Israel relations and identify as “pro-Israel.” Distinguishing their policies is the Democrats’ willingness to criticize Israeli foreign policy toward Palestine and Iran, while Republicans’ support is unconditional and often complimentary. U.S. Christian Zionists also unconditionally support Israel. Zev Chafets, chief press spokesman under Prime Minister Menachem Begin and author of *A Match Made in Heaven*, recently stated, “the actions of any particular Israeli government are irrelevant to their [Christian Zionist] reasons for supporting Israel. Whatever Israel says, whatever Israel wants, the evangelicals support it, unconditionally.”<sup>34</sup> This unconditional nationalism for Israeli Jews—even as it damages U.S. international relations—can only be understood as being a result of their religious beliefs and practices. But it is nevertheless nationalism. On the Christian Zionist apocalyptic timeline, such partisanship makes sense because Israel and Israelis are perceived on a moral ascendancy, while the United States is in moral decline.<sup>35</sup> John Hagee, at the 2006 inaugural CUFI dinner, called Israel’s war with Hezbollah “a battle between good and evil” and said support for Israel was “God’s foreign policy.”<sup>36</sup> The dinner was addressed by the Israeli Ambassador, greetings were read by Hagee from then-President Bush and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and the event was attended by several Republican senators. CUFI now boasts 3 million members.<sup>37</sup>

The IDF is God’s army, and the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is an analogue for the divine right of a king.<sup>38</sup> In a 2015 poll asking Republicans which national or international leader they admire most, 12 percent named Netanyahu, tied with Ronald Reagan. Admiration was at 22 percent among Republican evangelicals. The neoconservative editor of the *Weekly Standard*, William Kristol, recently summed-up this admiration: “Bibi would probably win the Republican nomination if it were legal.”<sup>39</sup> Criticizing Netanyahu or Israeli foreign policy is anathema to Christian Zionism. At the conference for Middle Eastern Christians where Ted Cruz was booed off the stage, Cruz aligned himself with Israel and Judaism rather than with Christianity, saying to the disapproving crowd, “Those who hate Jews hate Christians... If you will not stand with Israel and the Jews, then I will not stand with you. Thank you and God bless you.”<sup>40</sup> He then walked offstage. Cruz was expressing a Christian Zionist discourse, one that trumps Christian co-religionists and in doing so draws racially informed geopolitical lines in the Middle Eastern sand. This territorial identification with the state of Israel, and the national religious identification with Jews, is one set against a racialized exclusion of Arabs and Islam—a widely held view among Christian Zionists.

One well respected Christian Zionist, Laurie Cardoza Moore, recently questioned whether Arab Christians are Christians at all: “Are they more Arab in the culture and background? Or are they followers? Do they read their Bible? Because I have read the Bible and [for] that land God made a covenant with Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, and their descendants forever. And part of their covenant was the land.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, on a recent pilgrimage to Israel, Mike Huckabee told *The New Yorker* that a two-state solution would not happen “on the same piece of real estate.”<sup>42</sup> Rather, the Palestinians, whom he denies legitimate nationality, are strictly an Arab problem.

Both Huckabee and Cruz were also shedding a long history of anti-Semitism associated with U.S. Christian Zionists. Huckabee was quoted expressing his “Judeo-Evangelical” nationalism: “I worship a Jew!... I have a lot of Jewish friends, and they’re kind of, like, ‘You Evangelicals love Israel more than we do.’ I’m, like, ‘Do you not get it? If there weren’t a Jewish faith, there wouldn’t be a Christian faith!’” Here Jews are rewritten into God’s contemporary interventions in history. The proof was the reestablishment of Israel, including God’s clear territorial sovereignty and protection of it. In other words, Jews are now insiders.

Central to the Christian Zionist categorization of insider and outsider is where their religious national allegiances are placed. They often criticize U.S. foreign policy if it is perceived to question or interfere with Israeli foreign policy because it is seen as challenging God’s infallible and inerrant plan. According to a 2013 Pew Research poll, 46 percent of white American evangelicals and only 31 percent of American Jews believe the United States needs to be more supportive of Israel.<sup>43</sup> A Bloomberg poll found that almost 60 percent of evangelicals say the United States should support Israel even if its interests diverge with U.S. interests.<sup>44</sup>

Some U.S. Christian Zionists think that U.S. foreign policy challenging God's morally superior Israel will have direct divine consequences. For example, Christian Zionists perceived Bush's 2015 Road Map to Peace in Israel and Palestine to result in the evacuation of Gush Katif, a former Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip. A North Carolina pastor saw Hurricane Katrina as "God's judgment for sins as diverse as the U.S. government's sanction of Gaza's evacuation [of Gush Katif]."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, William Koenig, a Christian Zionist and former third-party presidential candidate, published two books arguing that both Hurricane Katrina and 11 September 2001 were products of God's wrath for wavering U.S. support of Israel. Koenig lists a series of natural, economic, and geopolitical disasters correlated to U.S. foreign policy critical of Israel: "The ten costliest insurance events in U.S. history; the twelve costliest hurricanes in U.S. history; three of the four largest tornado outbreaks in U.S. history; the two largest terrorism events in U.S. history. All of these major catastrophes and many others occurred or began on the very same day or within 24 hours of U.S. presidents Bush, Clinton, and Bush applying pressure on Israel to trade her land for promises of 'peace and security.'"<sup>46</sup>

Christian Zionists have developed their own "evangelical foreign policy" that challenges U.S. interests and realist, liberal, and Marxist positions.<sup>47</sup> It is distinct not least because it stems from theological rather than economic, social, or political considerations. And this furthers the point of this article: it is U.S. politics that functions for their theological interest to serve God's covenantal destiny. This is true even when at the expense of all other geopolitical considerations, their fellow Christians, and the United States itself.

## Conclusion

At John Hagee's 2015 annual CUFI Washington Summit, Christian Zionism's influence on the Republican Party was clear. Six Republican presidential candidates attended in person or by video uplink, including Huckabee, Cruz, Lindsey Graham, George Pataki, Rick Santorum, and Jeb Bush. Bush was asked in a summit interview what he thought of Israeli settlements, to which he responded, "they should be able to continue to build settlements."<sup>48</sup> In the widely read book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Mearsheimer and Walt pointed out the effects Christian Zionists and their U.S. political allies have on the Israeli landscape: "By providing financial support to the settler movement and by publically inveighing against territorial concessions, the Christian Zionists have reinforced hardline attitudes in Israel and the United States and have made it more difficult for American leaders to put pressure on Israel. Absent their support, settlers would be less numerous in Israel, and the U.S. and Israeli governments would be less constrained by their pressure in the occupied Territories as well as their political activities."<sup>49</sup> The Manichean language that presidents employ to satiate the Christian Zionist vote damages U.S. international relations credibility at best, and at worst normalizes racist outsider geopolitics in the United States and provides fodder for apocalyptic groups like ISIS who base their worldview around a cosmic war on Earth.<sup>50</sup>

Christian Zionists are religious nationalists *par excellence*. Christian Zionists challenge Brubaker's assertion that the term "religious nationalism" is contradictory. The belief and practice of Zionism by U.S. Evangelical Christians is a performance of their religion. Built into their religion is the veneration for the nation of Jewish Israelis. Because they are Christian first and American second, their veneration and support for Israel usurps their veneration for the United States in issues of foreign policy. Religion is not simply instrumental to nationalist ends; their religion is nationalism. Moreover, Christian Zionism is no longer the result of a functional reverence for Israel; that is, that they only support Israel to further the Apocalypse and bring about Christ's return. While this anti-Semitism was historically true, Christian Zionists since the turn of the century now embrace Judaism and incorporate it into their own Christian beliefs and practices in an attempt to become more Jewish, and more Israeli. To be clear, for Christian Zionists, the United States still holds a moral voice domestically and internationally, and it is respected as a homeland for purposes of civic or constitutional nationalism. But this civic nationalism takes second place when it comes to Israel. Christian Zionists feel that the United States is in moral, economic, and political decline. At times, the United States itself becomes the enemy of Judeo-Evangelical nationalism.



## Notes

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- <sup>12</sup> Dan Cohen-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
- <sup>13</sup> G E. Ladd was the best known post-Tribulation revisionist. See: John A D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For an example of a popular post-Tribulation Christian Zionist author, see: Joel C. Rosenberg, *Epicenter 2.0: Why Current Rumbles in the Middle East Will Change Your Future* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2008).
- <sup>14</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- <sup>15</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
- <sup>16</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); see also: Roger Friedland, "Money, Sex and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 3 (2002): 381–425.
- <sup>17</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012): 2–20.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>19</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
- <sup>20</sup> Melani McAlister, "What is Your Heart For?: Affect and Internationalism in the Evangelical Public Sphere," *American Historical Literature* 20, no. 4 (2008): 875.
- <sup>21</sup> David Kuo, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2007).
- <sup>22</sup> Noel Feldman, "Islam, Terror and the Second Nuclear Age," *New York Times Magazine*, Oct 29, 2006.
- <sup>23</sup> This includes the so-called "Muslim travel ban," his Supreme Court pick Neil Gorsuch, vice president pick Mike Pence, and his threat to overturn the 1954 Johnson Amendment that would limit political preaching in tax-exempt churches.
- <sup>24</sup> Vann R Newkirk II, "Pat Robertson Gives Trump a Pass on Russia," *The Atlantic*, July 14, 2017.
- <sup>25</sup> Tristan Sturm, "Prophetic Eyes: The Theatricality of Mark Hitchcock's Premillennial Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 11, no. 2 (2006): 231–55.

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- <sup>26</sup> Miranda Blue, "Trump's Evangelical Team Defends Kushner Against Russian 'Nonsense,'" *Right Wing Watch*, July 25, 2017.
- <sup>27</sup> See: "Donald 'Constantine' Trump? Could Heaven be Intervening Directly in the Election?" *Church Militant*, September 21, 2016.
- <sup>28</sup> Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- <sup>29</sup> Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figueroa, "Evangelical Fundamentalism and Catholic Integralism in the USA: A surprising ecumenism," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, July 2017, <https://laciviltacattolica.com/june-2017/evangelical-fundamentalism-and-catholic-integralism-in-the-usa-a-surprising-ecumenism/>.
- <sup>30</sup> Scott McConnell, "How the GOP Became the Israel Party," *American Conservative*, April 8, 2015.
- <sup>31</sup> William McCants makes this point that ISIS has borrowed apocalyptic evangelical thought (premillennial dispensationalism) to justify its own prejudicial geopolitical colonialism; see: William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2015).
- <sup>32</sup> Shibley Telhami, "How to (Almost) Eliminate the Partisan Divide in the Middle East," *Washington Post*, December 14, 2015.
- <sup>33</sup> "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious: Evangelicals Remain the Largest Religious Group in GOP Coalition," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, November 3, 2015.
- <sup>34</sup> Zev Chafets, "Israel's Most Devoted Ally: U.S. Evangelical Christians," *European Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2007).
- <sup>35</sup> Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).
- <sup>36</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, "For Evangelicals, Supporting Israel Is 'God's Foreign Policy,'" *New York Times*, November 14, 2006.
- <sup>37</sup> See: *Christians United For Israel*, [http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_AboutCUFI](http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_AboutCUFI).
- <sup>38</sup> At the "Feast of Tabernacles," a festival run by the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, Netanyahu has presented to the audience of 7,000 Christian Zionists each year since 2009. Each year I attended (2007, 2008, and 2009), the IDF was frequently spoken of as guided by the hand of God. Also see: Mark Hitchcock, *The Coming Islamic Invasion of Israel* (Oklahoma: Hearthstone Publishing, 2002).
- <sup>39</sup> Peter Baker, "For G.O.P., Support for Israel Becomes New Litmus Test," *New York Times*, November 27, 2015.
- <sup>40</sup> A Pew Poll among Israeli Arab Christians found that 79 percent of respondents found settlements to hurt Israel's security, and opposed the building of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. See: "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, March 8, 2016; Nicholas Frankovach, "If You Will Not Stand with Israel and the Jews, Then I Will Not Stand with You," *National Review*, January 23, 2016.
- <sup>41</sup> Laurie Cardoza Moore is a deacon in the World Council of Independent Christian Churches and President of Proclaiming Justice to the Nation, an evangelical organization whose "mission is to increase awareness and action by educating Christians about their Biblical responsibility to stand with their Jewish brethren and Israel." See: "PJTN President," *Proclaiming Justice to the Nations*, <https://www.pjtn.org/pjtn-president/>; Tom Gjelton, "Evangelicals Key to Republican Support for Israel," *NPR: All Things Considered*, March 22, 2016.
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- <sup>43</sup> "A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Connection with and Attitudes Toward Israel," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, October 21, 2013.
- <sup>44</sup> "Bloomberg Politics National Poll Finds Deep Partisan Split on Israel and Iran," *Bloomberg*, April 15, 2015.
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- <sup>46</sup> William Koenig, *Eye to Eye: Facing the Consequences of Dividing Israel* (Phoenix: About Him, 2006), 1.
- <sup>47</sup> Stuart Croft, "'Thy will be done': the new foreign policy of America's Christian Right," *International Politics* 44, no. 6 (2007): 692.
- <sup>48</sup> "2015 Christians United for Israel - Presidential Candidate Forum," *OfficialCUFI*, July 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmJHBVbVPag>.
- <sup>49</sup> John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 137–38.
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